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ABSTRACT

Conventionalization in partners in a marital relationship refers to one partner's tendency to ascribe to his or her spouse, and to the relationship, socially acceptable qualities and to minimize undesirable qualities. Questionnaire research on physical violence in both marital and dating couples has not yet included measures of conventionalization to control for social desirability. This study was conducted to examine the relationship between coercion and conventionalization in dating couples. Undergraduate students (N=488) completed a measure of coercion, defined as verbal and/or physical behaviors to compel compliance, and a conventionalization measure concerning their current or most recent dating relationship. The results indicated that increased conventionalization was associated with increased depth of involvement, increased duration of the relationship, decreased levels of coercion, and an ongoing versus past relationship. (Author/NB)

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Conventionalization Among Dating Couples

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Questionnaire research on physical violence in both marital and dating couples has not yet included measures of conventionalization to control for social desirability. To examine the relationship between coercion and conventionalization, a measure of coercion, defined as verbal and/or physical behaviors to compel compliance, and a conventionalization measure was administered to a sample of 488 undergraduates concerning their current or most recent dating relationship. The results indicate that increased conventionalization is associated with increased depth of involvement, increased duration of the relationship, decreased levels of coercion, and an ongoing versus past relationship.

The tendency for respondents to questionnaires describe themselves and/or groups in which they are involved in a stylized "good" manner, or in a "positive light", reminiscent of a culture "ideal", has been long noted (Ellis, 1948). Usually this tendency takes the form of minimizing actions, beliefs or feelings which the person believes to be socially unacceptable and to enhance those actions, beliefs, feelings which the person believes to be desirable. From this observation, measures (e.g., Marlowe - Crowne Social Desirability Scale; Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) of this tendency have been developed and incorporated into a wide range of research and clinical personality measures.

Edmonds (1967 and 1972) proposed that a similar process, termed conventionalization, might operate for partners in a marital relationship (i.e., that a partner might ascribe to his/her partner and the relationship socially acceptable qualities and minimze undesirable qualities). Further, he

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proposed that measures of relationship satisfaction would correlate highly with a measure of conventionalization. As hypothesized, he found that large proportions of his respondents endorsed flattering statements and denied unflattering statements about their partner and their relationship. Secondly, he found that a measure of conventionalization [Marital Conventionalization Scale, Edmonds, 1967] correlated .60 with a measure of relationship satisfaction. Since that time similar correlations between conventionalization and satisfaction have been noted (e.g., Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; and Wilson & Filsinger, 1986).

As presented by Edmonds it appeared to us that conventionalization was a characteristic of the person. As such it would be expected to be relatively independent of various characteristics of the relationship (e.g. duration of the relationship, stage of the relationship), but might be dependent on characteristics of the person (e.g., sex or age). Secondly, it seemed that conventionalization should be relatively independent of events (e.g., coercive behavior by the respondent's partner) in the relationship which might be expected to shatter the ability of either partner to maintain a facade of conventionality.

The possibility that conventionality might function as a suppressor variable was intriguing because it offered the possibility of strengthening the ability of variable sets to predict coercion in an intimate relationship. This goal is important because currently reported correlations between predictor variables such as frequency of alcohol use, level of sexual involvement, depth of involvement, violence in the family of origin, or number of sexual partners and a criterion of frequency of physical coercion have been less than satisfying. For example, Sigelman, Berry & Wiles (1984) reported correlations of .26 or less between family of origin and current relationship variables and perpetration of violent acts ranging from throwing an object at their partner to using a gun or knife for both males and females. More recently, Maguin, Curtis & Stollak (1987b), using a path analytic strategy found maximal correlations of from .15 to .23 for males and from .18 to .43 for females between family of origin, dating history, or current relationship variables and a criterion of the number of coercive actions perpetrated.

It is not clear whether the low correlations described above are the result of a failure to include the types of measures relevant to this subject area or to the characteristics of persons as regards their willingness to recount their

perpetrating or receiving coercive behavior. Some evidence that characteristics of the persons contribute is provided by clinicians working with battered women and their assailants (e.g., Walker, 1979; Hilberman & Munson, 1977-78; Ganley, 1981; and Coleman, 1980). Both Ganley and Coleman report that the assailants try to minimize or deny the extent of the conflict, and their responsibility for continuing the conflict by shifting the blame to their parnter. Following an assault, Walker describes the assailants as feeling guilty and ashamed of their behavior. The victims are described as also attempting to minimize the extent of their injuries and the responsibility of their partner for their injuries. To outsiders, the victims seem to be attempting to maintain an image of ordinariness. While the seperate strategies of both victim and assailant may be understood to be attempts to preserve self esteem, these same strategies also make identifying causative variables difficult.

The purpose of the present study is two fold. First, to validate the concept of conventionalization in a sample of dating couples, and second, to examine the relationship between conventionalization and receiving coercion in a dating relationship.

Method

Subjects. The subjects in this study were 488 undergraduates enrolled in introductory and middle level psychology classes at a large state university. The mean age of the subjects was 19.5 years (range: 16 to 37). Fifty percent of the subjects were female and 89% of the subjects were white. Subjects reported having been in a mean of 10.3 dating relationships (range: 1 to 58) ranging in length from less than one month to more than six years. Sixty five percent of the sample had had intercourse with one or more partners. At the time of this study, 59% of the subjects were currently involved in a relationship.

Instruments. In return for class participation credits, subjects completed a questionnaire package concerning the focus relationship. The focus relationship was defined to be the subject's current or most recent dating relationship. The questionnaire package consisted of the Marital Conventionalization scale (Edmonds, 1967), a 36 item measure conflict resolution behavior (RCOERCE) and an instrument to collect information on the current or most recent relationship, on the respondents' dating and sexual experience history, and family of origin. Items on the Marital Conventionalization Scale were slightly altered to be appropriate for a dating population

and hereafter is called the Conventionalization Scale. A more complete description may be found in Naguin, Curtis & Stollak, 1987a).

Results

As developed by Edmonds (1967), the Marital Conventionalization scale is purported to be a unidimensional measure of the coventionalization construct. To verify this hypothesis for the sample in this study, a factor analysis (Burdsal, 1981) was performed for the CS. The results of the common factor solution (communalities set to squared multiple correlations) showed the first two eigenvalues to be 4.51 and .41, respectively, which supported the unidimensional construct hypothesis. Item - total correlations were computed and found significant at beyond the .001 level. The alpha for the scale was .86. From this evidence, it was concluded the scale had acceptable psychometric properties in this application.

To evaluate the stability of CS scores across subgroups of the sample, an ANOVA was constructed for sex of respondent, focus relationship type, and depth of involvement in the focus relationship and a second ANOVA was constructed for sex of respondent, focus relationship type, and duration of the focus relationship. Depth of involvement was categorized as non exclusive dating, exclusive dating, discussing marriage, and engaged/living together. Duration was categorized as less than one month, one to two months, three to six months, seven to twelve months, one to two years, and three or more years. An p level of .05 was chosen to evaluate significance.

The results of the ANOVA for CS by sex by focus relationship type by depth of involvement showed a significant main effects for focus relationship type, $F(1, 457) = 15.86$, $p < .001$, and depth, $F(3, 457) = 14.77$, $p < .001$. The main effect term for sex and all interaction terms were not significant. The test of simple main effects for focus relationship type was significant, $F(1, 484) = 62.12$, $p < .001$ as was the test of simple main effects for depth, $F(3, 484) = 32.19$, $p < .001$. Inspection of group means for the focus relationship factor revealed that the current relationship group ($M = 5.56$) was significantly higher than most recent relationship group ($M = 2.89$). Post hoc comparison (Tukey HSD) of group means showed that each pair of means - with the exception of the discussing marriage - engaged/living together pair - were significantly different at the .05 level. As shown in Table 1, the CS score shows a steady rise as the relationship deepens.

Table 1: Mean Conventionalization Score as a Function of Depth of Involvement in a Dating Relationship

Depth of involvement	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Dating nonexclusively	2.46	2.50	139
Dating excluxsively	4.46	3.90	226
Discussing marriage	6.35	3.97	94
Engaged/living together	7.83	3.58	29

The results of the ANOVA for CS by sex by focus relationship type by duration of relationship showed significant main effect for focus relationship type, $F(1, 457) = 40.11$, $p < .001$, and duration of relationship only, $F(5, 457) = 3.22$, $p < .010$. The test of simple main effects for focus relationsip type was significant as described above. The test of simple main effects for duration was also significant, $F(5, 477) = 6.58$, $p < .001$. Table 2 presents the group means and standard deviations for duration factor. Post hoc tests (Tukey HSD) found significant differences in group means at the .05 level between the 'One month or less' group and the 'Seven to twelve months' group and 'One to two years' group. Significant differences were also found between the 'One to two months' group and the 'One to two years' group; and between the 'Three to six months' group and the 'One to two years' group.

Table 2: Mean Conventionalization Score as a Function of Duration of the Dating Relationship

Length of Relationship	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
One month or less	2.67	2.93	61
1 to 2 months	3.71	3.67	66
3 to 6 months	4.03	3.90	106
7 to 12 months	5.20	3.91	87
1 to 2 years	5.71	3.98	112
3 years or more	4.49	3.95	51

To investigate the joint influence of both duration and depth, the correlation between CS and duration controlling for focus relationship type was computed for each of the four relationship stages (non exclusive dating, exclusive dating, discussing marriage, and engaged/living together.) The duration of the relationship was taken to be the midpoint of the given interval which incurs a restriction of range. Thus, some caution is warranted as regards the correlations. The results of these computations, shown in Table 3, indicated that the correlation between duration and CS was nonsignificant for persons reporting either a non exclusive relationship or an exclusive dating relationship. The correlation between duration and CS was significant for persons discussing marriage or engaged/living together and indicates that respondent's who reached a the level of involvement more quickly report higher CS scores.

Table 3: Correlation Between Conventionalization and Duration of Relationship Controlling for Focus Relationship Type and Depth of Involvement

Depth of Involvement	Correlation	N
Dating nonexclusively	.08	131
Dating excluxsively	-.04	221
Discussing marriage	-.24*	91
Engaged/living together	-.47*	26

*p < .05, two tailed.

To evaluate the relationship of CS to receiving coercion, defined as being the target of verbal and/or physical behaviors intended to compel compliance or submission to the will of the other, a previously developed 36 item coercion scale (RCOERCE) was used (Maguin, Curtis, & Stollak, 1987b). Briefly, this scale treats conflict resolution behavior as being ordered along a unidimensional (Guttman) scale. The respondent's score is based on how many item he/she endorses. The alpha reliability of the scale for this sample was .92.

To present the relationship between RCOERCE, sex of the respondent, duration of the relationship and depth of involvement, one ANOVA was constructed for sex of respondent and depth of involvement and a second ANOVA was constructed for sex of respondent and duration of the current relationship. Both

depth of involvement and duration were categorized as previously described.

The results of the ANOVA for RCOERCE by sex by depth of involvement showed significant a main effect for depth, $F(3, 480) = 4.57$, $p < .006$, and for sex, $F(1, 480) = 7.77$, $p < .004$. The sex by depth interaction term was not significant. The test of simple main effects for depth was significant, $F(3, 484) = 4.41$, $p < .005$. Post hoc comparison (Tukey HSD) of group means, see Table 4, showed that only the non exclusively dating and discussing marriage groups were significantly different at the .05 level. The test of simple main effects for sex was significant, $F(1, 486) = 7.43$, $p < .007$. The mean ($M = 10.07$, $N = 243$) for males was significantly higher than that for females ($M = 8.33$, $N = 245$). Thus, while there is some relationship to between depth of involvement and receiving coerceion, the principle finding is that males report receiving more coercion.

Table 4: Mean Coercion Received Score as a Functi( ) of Depth of Involvement in a Dating Relationship

Depth of involvement	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Dating nonexclusively	7.96	6.48	139
Dating excluxsively	8.94	6.96	226
Discussing marriage	11.15	7.57	94
Engaged/living together	10.72	8.07	29

The results of the ANOVA for RCOERCE by sex by duration of relationship showed significant main effects for duration of relationship, $F(5, 471) = 13.79$, $p < .001$, and for sex, $F(1, 471) = 13.11$, $p < .001$. The sex by duration term was not significant. The test of simple main effects for duration was significant, $F(5, 477) = 13.03$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons (Tukey HSD) for the means shown in Table 5 found significant differences at the .05 level between the 'One month or less', 'One to two months', and 'Three to six months' groups and the 'One to two years' group and 'Three years or more' group. Significant differences were also found between the 'Seven to twelve months' group and the 'Three years or more' group. The simple main effects test for sex is the same as that reported in the analysis for RCOERCE by sex by depth of involvement. Unlike the finding for depth of involvement, RCOERCE tends to increase in a generally linear

fashion as the relationship lengthens.

Table 5: Mean Coercion Received Score as a Function of Duration of the Dating Relationship

Length of Relationship	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
One month or less	6.74	6.21	61
1 to 2 months	7.03	5.90	66
3 to 6 months	7.05	5.67	106
7 to 12 months	9.20	6.91	87
1 to 2 years	11.24	7.20	112
3 years or more	14.14	8.27	51

To evaluate the relationship between receiving coercion and conventionalization, partial correlations were calculated between RCOERCE and CS seperately for males and females at each category of involvement (e.g., discussing marriage) while controlling for duration of relationship and type of focus relationship. As before, duration was coded as the midpoint of the interval and, thus, the same caution concerning restricted range is appropriate. The results of these computations are shown in Table 6. From these data it appears that the association between conventionalization and receiving coercion is relatively stable over the depth of involvement in the relationship.

Table 6: Partial Correlation Between Conventionalization and Receiving Coercion as a Function of Depth of Involvement for Males and Females

Depth of Involvement	Males		Females	
	Correlation	N	Correlation	N
Dating nonexclusively	-.38*	58	-.15	68
Dating exclusively	-.35***	121	-.38***	95
Discussing marriage	-.40*	32	-.25	54
Engaged/living together	-.54*	11	-.34	11

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.
All p values are two tailed.

Discussion

This study was undertaken to examine the reliability and validity of a measure of marital conventionality, the MC scale, developed by Edmonds (1967), in a sample of dating couples. As originally envisaged by Edmonds, the MC scale would permit a control for a social desirability response set in regard to the relationship. The second purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between conventionality and receiving coercion fron the respondent's partner. It was hypothsized that persons with high idealization scores would also report elevated scores on a measure of receiving coercion (RCOERCE).

The results of a factor analysis of the CS scale supported the supposition that it retained its unidimensional properties in a sample of dating couples. Since conventionalization was expected to function as a property of the person, it was expected to vary, perhaps, with characteristics of the person, but not with the characteristics of the relationship in which the respondent was involved. This hypothesis was not supported. It was found that CS did not differ between males and females, but that it did depend in a generally linear fashion on the duration of the relationship, on the depth of involvement, and on whether the respondent was reporting on their current relationship or their most recent one. Thus, it seems that conventionality is more closely tied to the respondent's relationship than to the respondent.

Although conclusions based on the relative comparison of F ratios may be tenous, the results showed a striking difference between the simple effects F for depth of involvement (32.19) and duration (6.58). This comparison indicates that conventionality is likely more closely tied to depth of involvement than to duration. The correlations between relationship duration and CS at different levels of involvement indicated that for nonexclusive and exclusive dating, duration exercised no influence. However, for deeper levels of involvement a significant relationship was found between duration and conventionality. Further, it tentatively appears that duration becomes more important as the relationship moves from discussing marriage to becoming engaged or living together. For these two latter stages of involvement, it was found that respondents who had progressed more quickly to either of these stage reported higher CS scores.

The results of the analysis of RCOERCE conformed to that previously reported in the dating violence literature with one exception. The level of coercion was higher in more involved or

longer duration relationships as has been reported by Cate et al., (1982). The exception was that males reported receiving significantly more coercion than did females. Previous findings on this point (e.g., Laner & Thompson, 1982 and Bernard & Bernard, 1983) indicate that males report experiencing less physical violence or abuse than do females. The discrepancy is due, we believe, to our definition of coercion which includes both verbal and physical strategies.

The results of the partial correlations between CS and RCOERCE controlling for duration of relationship and focus relationship type and computed seperately for males and females for each category of involvement are consistent within sampling error. It appears that the relationship between receiving coercion and conventionalzation is somewhat stronger and, perhaps, more consistent for males than for females. However, because the sample size for the correlations is generally quite small, the variation may be most likely due to sampling error. Thus, it seems that there is a rather stable relationship between CS and RCOERCE for both males and females - increases in coercion received are associated with decreases in conventionality. Thus, with respect to the second purpose of this study - to investigate the usefullness of a measure of conventionality - the results support the hypothesis that such measures would be useful. In fact, from data in this study, it would appear that CS may account for from 8% to 16% of the variance in receiving coercion.

Taking the three principle results from this study: 1) the presence of a relationship between relationship characteristics and CS; 2) the absence of a relationship between person characteristics and CS; and 3) the presence of a negative relationship between RCOERCE and CS presents us with a confusing picture. The rise in conventionalization with involvement indicates that persons are much more likely to present their relationship as matching social ideal as their relationship deepens. This process is apparently independent of duration except for persons who are discussing marriage, engaged or living together. For this group a longer duration leads to lower CS scores. Secondly, the impact of receiving coercion is stationary across depth of involvement and leads respondents to indicate that their relationship does not match the social ideal. Third, the process is similar for both males and females.

In reviewing the above data it strikes us that the propensity of subjects to endorse conventional responses can be understood as a natural consequence of the mate selection process. While there are undoubtly individual differences in the propensity to endorse conventional responses, the broader picture indicates a

more interesting process. It strikes us that the process of selecting a mate and defining and sustaining a committment to that person requires that the respondent come to represent that person as non ordinary (i.e., special or idealized in some respects). To do that requires that the respondent delete disconfirming information and enhance confirming information. Indeed, in speculating about this we were led to wonder about persons who did not engage in this process. For example, could such persons sustain an intimate and long lasting relationship. As a measure of this process, the Edmonds scale functions quite well.

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